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# Supporting Roma Voices

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In the first instance, with regard to all the people who took the time to talk with us in a full, detailed and patient manner, it is hoped that this report is able to accurately reflect their views and experiences. We would also like to thank the many organisations and people who helped initiate the fieldwork and without whose help this project would not have been possible. Many organisations and individuals helped in numerous ways and without their help this work would have been much more difficult. Particular gratitude is extended to Romano Lav in Glasgow, David Pongo in Salford and the Czech, Slovak Roma Centre in Leicester. Acknowledgement is also made to the support received by the authors from both the Roma Support Group and BHA for Equality.

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During the production of this report and the delivery of the wider project it is clear that there are significant challenges to be met but even greater capacity and resilience within the Roma communities to overcome such challenges. It is hoped that this report can provide some inspiration for newly emerging groups, such as Roma Futures in Sheffield, and help sow the seeds of further grassroots action led by Roma for Roma to reduce social inequalities.

This report is dedicated to all of those people who are now living in the UK who arrived from elsewhere to create a better life; perhaps not all by choice but by circumstance.

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# Summary

The Supporting Roma Voice project has aimed to address emerging knowledge gaps in the way in which the inclusion of migrant Roma in the UK is being addressed. Specifically, research by Brown, Scullion and Martin (2013) identified a demand from public authorities for social inclusion work directed towards migrant Roma communities to be developed and delivered by members of migrant Roma communities themselves. However, what was also lacking was an adequate evidence base about the settlement of migrant Roma in the UK and the varied experiences associated with this transition.

This report explores the views and experiences of a large number of Roma people who have migrated to the UK in recent years. The research was designed in partnership with a team of researchers from the Roma communities and undertaken wholly by these researchers. The research study aimed to explore the following issues:

- The settlement and integration experiences of Roma migrants living in areas across the UK.
- The specific areas of community relations, housing, education, employment and social welfare and their role in settlement in the UK.
- The provision of knowledge that would enable local authorities and other services to enhance the settlement experience of Roma migrants now and in the future.

A total of 159 people participated in 19 focus groups, which took place in the following locations: Glasgow, Leicester, London, Oldham, Salford and Sheffield. It should be noted that owing to the heterogeneity of the Roma population this report does not attempt to make definitive statements about the situation and views of all Roma migrants in the UK. This report was co-authored by members of the academic team in partnership with community researchers. The fieldwork was undertaken in early 2016 prior to the UK's referendum on staying in the European Union.





**HELP**

**SUPPORT**

**ADVICE**

**GUIDANCE**

# Key findings

## Settlement and life in the UK

- The decision to move to the UK involved a combination of push and pull factors for respondents, coupled with an aspiration to improve the quality of their lives and those of their family members. However, a sense of opportunity afforded by the UK should be contextualised by the experience of persistent discrimination against Roma populations in their countries of origin, with particular reference to access to the paid labour market, education and positive community relations.
- Family members often played a central role in terms of settlement decisions when in the UK and in the provision of social support upon arrival. Furthermore, cases of destitution were not uncommon and in such instances people relied on the support of family and close networks in order to provide food and shelter until they were able to support themselves once more.
- Social relations between Roma and non-Roma populations were broadly seen as convivial to positive, with many examples provided of neighbourly behaviour. However, there were suggestions of negative relations between Roma and non-Roma populations in both workplaces and schools.
- Housing was emerging as a key area of concern, with the majority of people accommodated in private rented sector properties. These were routinely described as being in poor condition, with some evidence of apparent exploitation of people from within the Roma community who experienced vulnerability by landlords and letting agents.

## Education

- Although the inclusivity of the UK education system was welcomed when compared to the discrimination experienced in their countries of origin, Roma migrants had mixed views about the quality of education being provided to them in certain schools. In turn, there

was some evidence of a notable number of Roma children being subject to bullying and harassment in schools by other pupils.

- The lack of English language skills and poor access to English language courses was seen as a major barrier to improving the overall settlement experience of Roma migrants. There was an overwhelming desire to learn English but inappropriate entry routes to do so. A lack of English skills was preventing people from communicating within their neighbourhood settings, engaging with key organisations (e.g. healthcare, education and local services), and securing more stable labour market opportunities. These issues were particularly acute for women and contributed to increasing their sense of isolation. In turn, there was increased stress placed on children, who were routinely assuming interpreting responsibilities for their parents owing to a lack of other options.

## Work and welfare

- Entry into the paid labour market was a central priority for Roma migrants and was seen as the main way to enhance the immediate outcomes for their families and provide stability for the future. At the same time, the acquisition of employment was a crucial component in helping people from the migrant Roma communities to regard themselves as full and participatory members of society.
- Many of the people spoken to were working in industries characterised by unskilled roles, low pay and long hours. In turn, there was evidence of complex relationships in the workplace, which pointed to a sense of suppression of Roma within the labour market that seemingly inhibited their attempts to move out of unskilled roles. Their vulnerability in the labour market also indicated that they were particularly susceptible to labour market exploitation.



- Although a number of respondents reported accessing the social welfare system, Roma respondents routinely argued against the popular positioning of them as 'welfare tourists', often reportedly not claiming welfare benefits even when they were eligible. Financial support was often provided by family members.

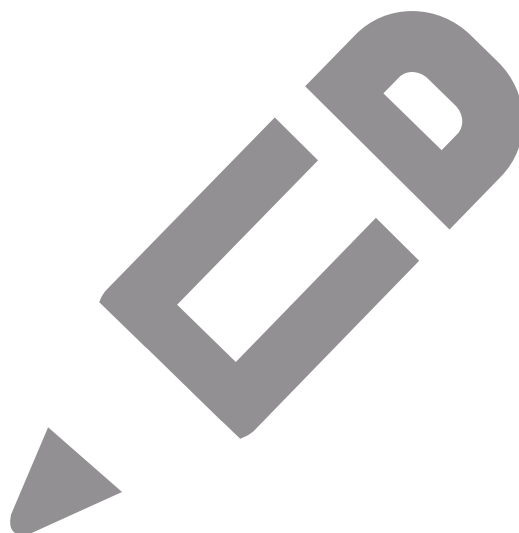
## The future

- Many respondents we spoke to had already realised their major aspiration in life by having migrated to the UK. The aspirations people had could be seen as modest and mundane. People were looking forward to improving their language skills, entering and progressing within the paid labour market, ensuring their children received a good education and living within a cohesive and non-discriminatory society. Since the fieldwork for this study was undertaken, the decision arising from the referendum on the desire to leave the European Union was delivered. The decisions that are now being taken on how the UK deals with the result of the referendum point to an immediate and medium-term future punctuated by uncertainty and precariousness for Roma currently in the UK.
- Many Roma people who took part in this work have arguably already 'integrated' into their local surroundings and have become full members of their wider neighbourhoods and communities. As such, owing to the size of the migrant Roma population in the UK, coupled with the persistent and, in some notable cases, increasing discrimination against Roma across Europe, members of the Roma community are likely to be a continuing presence across the UK for the foreseeable future.
- For the social inclusion of Roma in the UK to become a reality, policy-makers at all levels need to take into account the experiences many people have of deep-seated discrimination against Roma within their countries of origin. Actions to facilitate greater social inclusion need to account for the systematic exclusion that has occurred in the way in which people have been permitted access to education, the labour market, democratic systems, healthcare and so on.
- Awareness-raising initiatives should be undertaken by those involved, directly or indirectly, in Roma inclusion policy at both strategic decision-making and front-line levels within statutory and commissioning agencies. These should be delivered, where possible, by appropriately qualified Roma facilitators.
- In order to more effectively overcome prejudice and enhance more sustainable social relations and intercultural dialogue, policy-makers are also advised to invest in initiatives that bring together policy-makers, Roma and non-Roma people around common concerns and issues.
- There are many talented people within the Roma community who can help to foster greater inclusion and reduce social inequalities. However, for resources to allow these leaders to emerge local authorities and other key agencies should support the growth of leadership within the Roma communities by helping to facilitate training and providing people with opportunities.
- Local authorities with significant Roma populations living in their areas should encourage and support the development of Roma community organisations and community groups. This could be done by targeting funding opportunities towards such populations and proactively providing technical assistance and capacity building.

## Recommendations

- There is a significant need to increase the supply of suitable ESOL provision that can be accessed by all sections of the Roma community at varying entry points and for specific applications by taking into account the needs and the special characteristics of the local communities.
- In order to provide better access to basic services for Roma communities local authorities, and key local partners, should create opportunities for Roma community members to become interpreters.
- Local authorities should take a proactive role in the wake of the discussions about the UK settlement as part of leaving the EU to ensure there are strategies in place to support Roma migrants, specifically as part of their wider work on migrant integration.

# 1. Introduction



## 1.1 Background

Mainly since the Council of Europe provided a definition of 'Roma' that aimed to be inclusive of many similar groupings across the European Union (EU), 'Roma' communities that recently migrated to the United Kingdom (UK) have often been collectively categorised along with long-standing indigenous ethnic groups such as Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers. Indeed, it is only recently that the UK Department for Education provided the option of recording separate 'Gypsy', 'Roma' and 'Other Gypsy/Roma' monitoring categories to schools and Early Years settings, albeit under the 'White' main category (Department for Education, 2015; 2016). Historically, Roma migrants to the UK were often obliged to select 'White Other', should they ascribe at all. The issue of the appropriateness of this inclusion has sparked a number of debates, which lay on a spectrum of questioning its homogenisation to welcoming the attempt at collectivism. On a practical level, shared characteristics between groups subsumed within the overarching 'Roma' label are very limited, and social contact between the different communities (migrant and indigenous) appears mostly minimal, although alliances have developed when considering issues of human rights and inequalities. On the most basic level, unlike Romany Gypsies, many Roma are not UK citizens, use English as an

additional language and tend not to have long-standing geographical ties to particular places and communities in the UK.

Although Roma arriving from Central and Eastern Europe are one of the UK's newest migrant communities, effective mobilisation by Roma to form collective representative groups is arguably significantly underdeveloped. As is the case with many migrant communities, Roma arriving in the UK face a period of adaptation, during which immediate concerns such as securing an income, accessing the labour market and finding a place to live often take priority over community representation and participation in community governance. Arguably, the lack of such mobilisation, as research has found, could largely be explained as a result of extreme marginalisation and discrimination by those bodies that, ordinarily, provide the capabilities to support inclusion (e.g. Fundamental Rights Agency, 2009; Brown, Dwyer, Martin, Scullion and Turley, 2015). This is linked to the lack of strategic direction towards Roma inclusion in the UK by the government, which has resisted producing a specific National Roma Integration Strategy (EU COM (2011) 173); this has been criticised as diverging from the dominant approach across the EU (e.g. Richardson and Ryder, 2012; Lane, Spencer and Jones, 2014).

The Supporting Roma Voice project aimed to address emerging gaps in the way in which the inclusion of migrant Roma in the UK was being addressed. Specifically, research by Brown, Scullion and Martin (2013) identified a demand from public authorities for social inclusion work directed towards migrant Roma communities to be developed and delivered by members of migrant Roma communities themselves. However, what was also lacking was an adequate evidence base about the settlement of migrant Roma in the UK and the varied experiences associated with this transition. There are notable exceptions to this, including European Dialogue (2009), Grill (2012), Brown et al. (2015) and a handful of others, but these studies have tended to focus on narrow areas, were led by non-Roma researchers and/or did not centrally involve members of the Roma community in the delivery of the study. In order to provide a detailed and contemporary understanding of the experiences across migrant Roma communities when settling in the UK, a participatory research study was devised as part of a wider project known as Supporting Roma Voice; this is described in detail below. The research study, which formed part of the wider project, aimed to explore a number of issues:

- The settlement and integration experiences of Roma migrants living in areas across the UK.
- The specific areas of community relations, housing, education, employment and social welfare and their role in settlement in the UK.
- The provision of knowledge that would enable local authorities and other services to enhance the settlement experience of Roma migrants now and in the future.

## 1.2 The Supporting Roma Voice project

Following Sweetman's (1998) assertion that 'Roma people are hesitant to be open about their background and culture, for fear of further prejudice' (p. 58), the project took as its starting point the principle that Roma are best placed to 'advocate' for their needs and, as part of democratic and participatory good practice, should be supported effectively to do this. In developing the project, the Council of Europe recommendation was central. This emphasised that schemes mediating between communities and authorities should place 'Roma citizens themselves – at the very heart of the process, thereby both mobilising their ability to participate and demanding the capacity of the public institutions to respond to it' (Council of Europe, undated).

Supporting Roma Voice was designed in order to develop skills for a small number of Community Advocates through building a knowledge base by designing and undertaking research. It was conceived as a two-year project and as a partnership between the Sustainable Housing & Urban Studies Unit (SHUSU) at the University of Salford, Manchester-based BHA for Equality and the Roma Support Group in London. The project recruited a Community Co-ordinator, who was based in Manchester, and a number of Community Advocates to be situated in three locations in England (London, Salford and Sheffield). All were from the Roma community, reflecting the diversity of the migrant Roma population in terms of gender, nationality, experiences and age.

One of the overriding aims of the project was to maximise the personal growth and development of the individuals affiliated with the project with a longer-term aim of developing the 'next generation' of leaders from the Roma community. In doing so, we were keen to ensure that the project did not repeat the mistakes highlighted by evaluations of past programmes, for example:





*...its effectiveness is frequently challenged by issues such as the low status of mediators and precarious employment conditions, dependency (on the head of the institution, political influence or community leaders) or the assignment of additional minor tasks, which are sometimes not included in the job profile. (Council of Europe Intercultural Mediation for Roma Communities, 2011)*

As such, the roles were adequately resourced employment opportunities, not short-term; all were paid the National Living Wage, with personal development opportunities, including training, integrated throughout the project. Year one of the project focused on developing an evidence base about the experiences of migrant Roma who had settled in the UK. This was co-designed between the full team and led entirely by the Community Co-ordinator and Advocates. The findings of this research form the basis for this report. Year two then made the transition to putting this knowledge into practice by building specific action plans for change in local areas (London, Salford and Sheffield). The Supporting Roma Voice project also maintained a presence at the National Roma Network in both the Working Group and Forum. Indeed, one of our team (Liviu Dinu) became the co-Chair of this Network in May 2016.

### 1.3 Outline of this report

This report provides an overview of the findings from the community-led research with migrant Roma in the UK. The report is intended to document the experiences of a sample of migrant Roma who have settled in the UK up to 2016. In doing so, the aim is that the accounts included here will inform public authorities, community-based practitioners and policy actors of the issues faced by Roma in the UK. This report has the following structure:

Following an overview of the methodology adopted in **Chapter 2**, the report presents the findings from the primary research in a number of thematic areas. More specifically, **Chapter 3** provides an overview of the experience respondents had when arriving and during the initial stages of settlement into communities. **Chapter 4** looks specifically at the issue of learning across the life course. Here, issues associated with the education of children are discussed alongside issues related to the education and training of adults. **Chapter 5** explores the area of work and employment. This looks at issues such as the conditions people work within and labour market exploitation, as well as the interconnected issue of social welfare. **Chapter 6** is the final findings chapter and looks at the role of family in the settlement experience and the specific experiences associated with healthcare. Finally, **Chapter 7** provides some concluding thoughts arising from this study and recommendations for policy and practice with respect to Roma inclusion in the UK.



## 1.4 Conventions used in this report

The following conventions are used in this report, and these are worth elaborating to ensure clarity of understanding for the reader:

- We use the term Roma throughout the report. We appreciate that this term may be disputed and appear homogenising, but we have taken a pragmatic view. Within this grouping are included individuals self-identifying as such in the areas within which the research took place. However, owing to the focus of the work on migrant Roma this effectively excludes indigenous UK Gypsies and Travellers.
- 'Quotes' included from respondents are distinguished by being in italic type and usually inset. These were derived from audio recordings, which have been subject to translation. Although we have attempted to ensure these are edited for clarity, the cited data also reflects the characteristics of everyday conversation.
- Where quotes are used, we have attributed them to individuals who attended the focus groups but coded them to ensure we protect the anonymity of those who participated. These are presented as either 'men', 'women' or 'mixed', to denote the gender make-up of the groups. This is then followed by the location where the focus group took place.



## 2. Methodology



The fieldwork for the research component of this study took place in six locations of the UK: Glasgow, Leicester, London, Oldham, Salford and Sheffield. These places were chosen because earlier work (Brown et al., 2013) had pointed to the presence of a sizeable population of migrant Roma living in their respective regions. Focus groups were chosen as the most suitable research method, as they provide an environment where participants can engage in the facilitated telling and sharing of stories concerning their experiences in the area. Focus groups tend to allow the discussion of differences of opinion and experience within groups and facilitate a collective understanding of the particular norms and values that a specific group brings to the research (Morgan, 1988; Lewis, 2003). The classic strategy for dealing with diversity in focus group studies is to create 'groups that maximise the similarity of participants within groups whilst emphasising differences between groups' (Morgan, 1988: 59). Therefore, ensuring homogeneity within particular groups according to nationality/ethnic identity and gender tends to increase the comfort of respondents and ensure effective discussion (Knodel, 1993). Furthermore, it was believed that focus groups were the most pragmatic method, given the challenges presented by undertaking multi-site research on potentially challenging issues led by developing researchers.

Respondents within the focus groups were recruited via purposive non-random sampling, primarily by Community Advocates and occasionally in partnership with other agencies, mostly in the voluntary and community sector. In Glasgow, we worked with Romano Lav, which itself evolved from an earlier project funded by Glasgow City Council (see Poole and Adamson, 2007). In Leicester, we partnered with the Czech, Slovak Roma Centre based in Leicester.

All Community Advocates were provided with an array of training throughout this phase, including specific role-play-based training on undertaking qualitative research through focus groups. The research team designed a number of research instruments, including an English-language version of the semi-structured question guide, a participant information sheet and a consent form, for common use across all focus groups. These were translated into the appropriate languages by the Community Advocates prior to use, if needed.

One member of the University of Salford team was present at all the focus groups to assist the Community Advocates in leading the group discussions, dealing with any queries that may arise from participants and ensuring consistency across the fieldwork locations. We aimed to convene four focus groups in each area, and these were

either gender-specific or mixed depending on the local circumstances and networks. Suitable venues for undertaking the groups were arranged with the help of local partners. The groups were held in the most appropriate language and managed by the Community Advocates, with external interpreters arranged where necessary. All focus group discussions were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim and, where required, translated into English. In most cases, the Community Advocates undertook this translation themselves. Each respondent received £20 as a thank you and reimbursement for their time and any travel costs.

A total of 159 people participated in 19 focus groups: 74 male and 85 female. Participation was limited to over-18s only, with a spread of ages from 18 years to 60 years of age. The breakdown by area was as follows:

- Glasgow – 36 people (19 women and 17 men)
- Leicester – 30 people (21 women and 9 men)
- London – 32 people (19 women and 13 men)
- Oldham – 14 people (7 women and 7 men)
- Salford – 12 people (5 women and 7 men)
- Sheffield – 35 people (14 women and 21 men)

When conducting research with excluded populations, it is often the case that access to the most excluded individuals does not occur. This is largely because the most disadvantaged respondents mistrust or fear researchers from outside their immediate community, of whom they have limited knowledge and experience. Additionally, researchers often face difficulties in making contact with the most excluded, who, by the very fact of their social isolation, are often the most difficult to access. As previously noted, access to respondents in this study was facilitated by the Community Advocates and some partner organisations. The focus groups were therefore routinely made up of individuals who were members of existing networks and possibly more formal welfare provisions. It is worth noting at this juncture that many of the respondents who took part in our focus groups could, therefore, be considered to be relatively privileged when compared to certain others within the wider diverse communities of migrant Roma resident in the UK.

It should be noted that the fieldwork for this study was undertaken prior to the UK's referendum on staying in the European Union.

## 2.1 Analysis and ethical issues

The University of Salford research team, in partnership with the Community Advocates and the Project Co-ordinator, analysed the English-language transcript stages of qualitative data analysis. Data was analysed using thematic coding and retrieval methods, with NVivo software used to assist this process. The Advocates were central to this process, feeding their analysis in via cross-team meetings and reflective accounts and commenting on and editing this report. This was an essential component in ensuring the analysis accurately reflected the discussions held, as well as highlighting nuances in the data.

The research team took ethical issues extremely seriously and were guided by a number of principles, namely: respecting the dignity, rights, welfare and safety of research participants; ensuring informed consent and voluntary participation; protecting anonymity; and doing no harm. The study was subject to the procedures required by the Ethical Approval Panel of the School of Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work and Social Sciences at the University of Salford, UK.

# 3. Arriving & settling in



## 3.1 Introduction

The majority of migrant Roma now living in the UK arrived as part of the general movement of citizens from Central and Eastern European countries following accession to the EU in 2004 and 2007, although small numbers had moved prior to this period as asylum seekers. The larger accession countries were represented across the research as a whole. In Sheffield and Glasgow the majority of participants were originally from Slovakia, while those in Salford comprised a mix of both Czech and Slovak migrants, as did the groups in Leicester (plus one Lithuanian Roma). The Oldham groups were exclusively attended by members of the Hungarian Roma community, while the four sessions in London were entirely composed of people from Poland.

The focus of this chapter is on the experience respondents had of arriving, community relations and housing in the UK. In order to fully understand this, and to provide some important contextual information, it is first necessary to explore the reasons given for coming to the UK. The focus then shifts to Roma migrants' perception of the welcome they received on arrival in the UK, why they chose particular areas, their experience of living in particular communities and day-to-day relations and their experience of accessing accommodation.

## 3.2 Length of time in the UK

A number of the Polish respondents had previously claimed asylum, with some having lived in the UK for twenty years. For others, the periods varied and often differed within families. Some had only been in the UK for one month, others for eight months, while some had lived in the UK for between five and fifteen years. In Glasgow, the length of stay varied between one and eleven years. In Sheffield, the majority of families had lived in the city for between eight and ten years, but across all the groups the data suggests that in general migration to the UK has not been (and is not) a static process, as families and individuals continue to depart from Central and Eastern Europe to start a new life here, and many spend varying periods of the year back in their country of origin.

## 3.3 Initial reasons for coming to the UK

When asked about the initial reasons for coming to the UK, three main themes emerged across all the focus groups. The primary motivation, and often the first to be cited in the discussion, was to find work. The second reason was to enhance their children's educational prospects. The third stimulus was to escape everyday hostility and prejudice:

*My husband had a job, which was temporary... it was very low-paid. That's why we had to come to England. We've chosen to come here because our family was here and we knew that there is a chance to get a job and to get our children into school for a better life. (FG16, Women, Sheffield)*

*I'm afraid Roma people will be beaten up soon in Poland. Have you seen all the graffiti in the cities saying that Roma people should be killed or they have to go back to Romania? I definitely prefer to be here in England. I blend in more easily, and that makes me feel safe. (FG10, Mixed, London)*

*At home in Romania, the gadjie would just discriminate you. Here, the children, it looks like they are happy and they feel very nice in school, very good in school. The children start to realise that they want to become somebody. (FG16, Women, Sheffield)*

The notion of the UK as providing some sort of hope for the future was ever-present in many of the narratives of the respondents, as this respondent said:

*So I feel like we have to help each other because we are here in England. We are here in England and this country helps us, we feel it helped us to be here and to live here and to have a decent life here. (FG8, Mixed, Leicester)*

These reasons were often interwoven in their pre-migration experiences; for example, the persistent struggle to get a job was attributed to widespread anti-Gypsyism, which in turn generated marginalisation and maltreatment at school. These motivations were often cited as evidence of a general desire for 'a better life', as respondents contrasted difficult experiences in their countries of origin, often punctuated by inequality, to the apparent opportunities afforded to them in the UK. The UK was routinely favourably compared to

their countries of origin within Central and Eastern Europe with regard to the notion of equality and often characterised as a place where anyone could make progress if you were willing to work hard. This was presented in direct contrast to areas within Slovakia, Poland or Hungary, where it was routinely seen as common to be rejected for jobs simply on the grounds of their ethnicity regardless of their official qualifications or skills, as this respondent commented:

*Here in England we have friends, Asian, Pakistani, Urdu, British people, we all see each other as equal and as the same human beings. We are friends, because we know we are all humans. We have the same body and we have to look at each other nice, but in Slovakia there's still this mentality calling you and putting names such as 'Gypsy'. (FG17, Men, Sheffield)*

A similar turn of phrase was used in the East Midlands: *'They feel equal here'* (FG7, Mixed, Leicester), where the reference to being treated as a human being in the UK was also made, as it was in the group discussion in Salford. A respondent in Glasgow remarked that in the UK whether one was *'Black or White, it doesn't matter'* (FG2, Men, Glasgow). Endemic racism back in the Czech Republic was described by respondents now resident in Leicester, manifested in police harassment, public violence, negative media portrayal and refusal of healthcare, but the most common examples given related to exclusion from the labour market and marginalisation in the respective education systems.

There was universal agreement across groups that prejudice had largely curtailed the labour market opportunities for Roma within their countries of origin. As two respondents in different groups explained, chances of securing paid work were slim to zero:





*You can be very well educated and still not get a decent job, or any job, because you are Roma. I came to this country because I thought we can have better opportunities here. As many people said before, we were persecuted in Poland.*  
(FG10, Mixed, London)

*Here, at least you know that you can work, even if it's a factory job; it is a job and you can get paid. Back home, you don't even have the opportunity to have a job.* (FG14, Women, Oldham)

Such sentiments echoed earlier findings from Czech Roma migrants interviewed in Liverpool (Scullion and Pemberton, 2010), who cited racism, and its impact on employment opportunities, as a major driver of migration. However, whilst work was the main driver for coming to the UK, only a few participants stated that their migration had been triggered by specific job offers. In Glasgow, the majority of respondents in one of the focus groups with men had come to work in a particular factory, but they were in a distinct minority. In general, from across the groups, it appears no definite plan existed for work before they arrived, as one respondent in Salford commented (via an interpreter):

*The gentleman says he didn't know what he was going to do when he came over to the United Kingdom. He said he used to work in Germany but he already had settled family in the UK who called him over and told him to take the opportunity and just find some work here. He was not worried about what he was going to be doing.* (FG15, Mixed, Salford)

As this quote succinctly illustrates, family and/or friends played a central facilitating role, not only in the decision to come in the first place but where to come to, and had been instrumental in arranging work. The role of chain migration was central in the focus groups. One man in Leicester related how a friend had encouraged him to come with the promise of assistance in getting a job. He went on to describe how the system worked, with one person helping the next in turn until there was enough money to rent a house for the remaining members of the family, who could be invited 'so that's how the community grows' (FG7, Mixed, Leicester). Similarly, women in Glasgow confirmed that 'everybody' had come because of work, but that this had only occurred because other people had already arrived and reported back that there was work available. The migration of family members was the norm among respondents. Even where people could be identified as having

travelled on their own, they had often been invited by relatives or friends. Quite often, there was a staggered arrival; typically, men arrived first, to be followed by their partners and children and occasionally other relatives:

*Respondent: First, my husband came here to his family and then after that I came as well with the children.*

*Interviewer: How long has it been?*

*Respondent: Three years.* (FG18, Women, Sheffield)

In addition to employment being a motivator for coming to the UK, in all six locations participants spoke of extremely negative personal experiences of education in their countries of origin, and of their desire to ensure better opportunities for their children. One woman, now resident in Glasgow, said that she had attended school in Slovakia for nine years but had felt discriminated against every day. Such assertions were typical of others' experiences in their countries of origin, for example:

*I knew that for my kids coming here I would be able to give them school and everything, in comparison to what we had in Poland.* (FG11, Mixed, London)

*Their children are progressing here, they can see their children having a future here and that's what they were expecting when they moved to the UK and they have opportunities now.* (FG7, Mixed, Leicester)

### 3.4 Areas of settlement and internal mobilities

The preference for living in particular cities or neighbourhoods was also discussed with respondents. When asked why they had chosen Sheffield, London or Glasgow in particular, the most common answer was that relatives were already living there. In many cases, as discussed above, men had moved first, to be followed by wives, children and other family members.

The network of established Roma communities across the UK provides plenty of potential for relocation. In terms of actual residence, only one man in Glasgow expressed a desire to move, to Derby, where there was seen to be another large Slovak Roma community. Nevertheless, in general respondents expected to stay where they were, which was often the only place they had lived in the UK. There were a number of reasons for this.



Respondents in a group in Glasgow stated that Govanhill was 'a good area' because of the support of other Roma:

*Respondent: Because always something, always have somebody to help me. Maybe somebody else coming.*

*Interviewer: So it's because of the network?*

*Respondent: Yes.*

*Interviewer: The fact that you are living here together?*

*Respondent: Yes, because maybe we don't understand. Somebody else understand, we go to him. Yes, he's coming for me. (FG4, Men, Glasgow)*

This was amplified by a respondent in Leicester (FG7, Mixed), who mentioned how his uncle had arrived in Birmingham but had been unable to find work there. A friend already living in Leicester had arranged work for him, so he had moved there. This man had then facilitated a move for his whole family to Leicester, which led to them all working for the same employer.

### 3.5 Community relations

For the most part, relations between people from Roma and non-Roma communities since their arrival in the UK were described as convivial to positive. There were numerous examples given of relations that could be described as neighbourly. Many respondents talked about mixing between different communities:

*I have a friend, she's like my best friend. I go to her house. She comes to my house like we are sisters and we help each other. Every day, we see each other and we talk to each other. I am happy and we are happy because we learn more English in this way from them. They are trying to learn to teach us as well. I am very pleased with this. (FG16, Women, Sheffield)*

*My neighbours are African, black people, and they are lovely. I grew up in Poland, and you know how it was, the same like with Roma stereotypes. I need to say that those people are really friendly. It's not like we are very good friends, but we don't have anything against each other. (FG10, Mixed, London)*

In all the locations where this research took place Roma lived in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods, and although there were occasions when this could cause friction this was often seen as a positive factor, for the very reason that they were not exposed as the only minority. In Leicester, attendees at one focus group described that

although they lived very near to each other in the same neighbourhood, they lived alongside other ethnic communities and that England was the best because 'black people, pink people, Czech people, you know everybody mixing' (FG7, Mixed, Leicester). As touched upon previously, such descriptions of positive relations were often narrated in stark contrast to their pre-migration experiences in their countries of origin. Such accounts of their pre-migratory lives were often punctuated by descriptions of discrimination, prejudice and hostility towards Roma and their families. In contrast, their lives in the UK tended to be described as more free where they could integrate or 'blend' in:

*I came also from Poland... You can be very well educated and still not get a decent job, or any job, because you are Roma. I came to this country because I thought we can have better opportunities here... I'm not hiding here that I am a Roma person, but it seems like a lot of people don't know we are Roma. They don't know who Roma are. There are so many cultures and ethnicities, we can't expect people to know all of them. I feel like I am blending in, and that's a good thing for me. (FG10, Mixed, London)*

*We were scared in the beginning that we would all be persecuted, but we knew that there were a lot of darker-skinned people here. People don't really pay so much attention to us here. In Poland you just go out on the streets and they would say right away 'Gypsy! Dirty!' Here in England we feel more comfortable. We go on the streets and no one really pays that much attention to us. (FG11, Mixed, London)*

There was a persistent and common thread throughout all the groups involved in this research about the restrictions imposed by having low levels of English language skills upon building relations with local non-Roma populations. There were many instances where respondents reported a desire to help local people, converse with neighbours and build friendships, which was damped by inadequate language skills:

*I cannot speak English, and that makes it difficult for me to make friendships here. I know who my neighbours are; we say hello to each other, and that's it, nothing more. (FG10, Mixed, London)*

*Yes, we are mixing with non-Roma because we have to go to the council or doctor but, for instance, I can't make friendships, because I don't speak the language. For example, I took my son to the hairdresser, and the hairdresser is a very young girl, lives close to us, and I think we could be good friends but we can't. I can understand her but I can't express myself, so for this I should have improved my English. (FG14, Women, Oldham)*

*I don't talk to non-Roma because I don't know how to talk in English and it's not been a long time since I'm here. For four months, so I'm quite limited. I only talk to Roma because this is what I know, and I know them. (FG16, Women, Sheffield)*

*...there is an old woman that lives next to my house but I don't know how to talk to her and I can see that she wants to say 'hello' to me and I can see that she's old and I want to help her but I just don't know how to tell her. (FG18, Women, Sheffield)*

In a minority of occasions, there were instances described where local populations were less than positive and where low levels of hostility were evidenced or perceived:

*Some are, and some people really like to provoke us... Some neighbours call the police because of the people, that they're not working. (FG1, Women, Glasgow)*

One of the striking issues that emerged in the discussions was the relatively poor relations that appeared to exist when in the UK between community members originating from the same Member State but from different ethnicities. This was particularly stark in the case of the focus group discussions in London, where respondents narrated occasions where they had anticipated or received discrimination of some sort against them. For instance:

*Very often Polish people have a negative stereotype of a Roma person. I went to a Polish shop a few days ago. I forgot my glasses and I couldn't read the label. I heard the two ladies were speaking in Polish, so I approached them and apologised, and I asked if they can help me. Suddenly they started to talk in English. I left them, and a few seconds later they started to speak in Polish, and they were saying, 'You know what? The gypsy cannot write and read. I'm not going to help her'. I came back to them, and I said, 'Listen, I'm not a gypsy for you and Miss, ever. Maybe I cannot read or write, but I'm more intelligent than you could ever dream to be'. (FG10, Mixed, London)*

*I'm not saying it's always like this, but a few times I was surprised how bad Polish people are towards Roma in the UK. (FG12, Mixed, London)*

Where such people were working in positions of influence such as local authorities, public services and shops or as translators, a number of incidents were cited that could be seen as discriminatory:

*I was having my disability assessment. I was there with my son, who is not fluent in English, but understands most of it. At some point, he realised that the translator is not saying everything we are saying, and sometimes he was coming up even with things we didn't say. (FG12, Mixed, London)*

However, it should be noted that positive relationships between communities originating from the same Member State were apparent, but seemingly not widespread:

*There's a Polish family next door, and we get along very well. If we are going away somewhere for a holiday we say to them to keep an eye on our flat. We do the same for them. (FG10, Mixed, London)*

There was also some suggestion of intra-Roma community tensions, which further underlines the heterogeneity of communities and the differences between how groups within Roma communities relate to one another:

*They don't know that there shouldn't be this kind of rubbish around these areas in Govanhill. Before, there wasn't this kind of rubbish, like that. Some people, like Romanians, get council houses and they destroy it. (FG1, Women, Glasgow)*

*They [Romanian Roma] get money from Jobseeker's. They beg for money. They go buy drink, while they don't buy clothes for their children. (FG1, Women, Glasgow)*



### 3.6 Housing

The discussion of accommodation in the UK, including accessing housing, housing conditions, affordability and the relationship with landlords, was an issue that played a significant role in most of the group discussions. Respondents often produced descriptions of their everyday lives with respect to housing, with these descriptions often situated within wider issues of inclusion and community relations.

In terms of the supply of housing, no one, from any group, commented that there was a lack of housing available for Roma to access; all reported having access to housing. All were renting, with no one reporting that they had been able to purchase a home. Although the size of families differed across the groups, it was common to find many respondents living in large families of between seven and ten people within a three-bedroom house. Such large families were most apparent within the groups in Sheffield. However, it should be noted that the ratio between people and space was not seen as a problem by the respondents.

The vast majority of respondents were accommodated within the private rented sector. For a minority of these respondents, such experiences of living in properties owned by private landlords were unproblematic. However, for the remainder their experiences had been fraught with issues related to a number of circumstances, including poor conditions upon moving in and a lack of investment in maintenance of these properties by the owners. The following excerpts are reflective of the many reports we received about poor accommodation standards in the private rented sector:

*The problem here in the UK is that when we move into property, the properties are usually very dirty. We have to clean them and make them habitable and we have to repair everything in a house on our own expenses, but once we do that we can live there and it's okay for us. (FG8, Mixed, Leicester)*

*I have a story in my previous apartment where the bathroom was upstairs. My pipe was broken and soaked the entire ceiling. They tried to convince the landlord for more than half a year to bring in people in order to repair the damage. (FG13, Men, Oldham)*



*So I lived in the house for four years and he never painted, he never fixed any electric or any water. He never invested even a penny in our property. The toilet was broken. (FG6, Mixed, Leicester)*

Respondents routinely reported not having their deposits returned when they left their property, mostly for spurious reasons. Respondents reported similar levels of poor treatment whether they dealt with a landlord directly or through a letting agent.

None of these issues are specific to Roma; these are well-documented issues faced by a whole section of the population in the UK that live in the private rented sector. The specific issue that is different within this study is the sense that on a number of occasions people from the Roma community were being exploited owing to their more vulnerable position, a lack of English language ability and a lack of awareness as to their rights. As a result, Roma often ended up finding themselves in particularly disadvantageous situations:

*They paid about £280 for everything and they didn't get anything back when they left the property. The estate agent said, well, they were discussing this at the beginning, like they have to change the floors. They said, 'You want it or you don't want it? We're going to give it to someone else'. They were not interested in what's going to happen. (FG5, Women, Leicester)*

In contrast, the handful of respondents who were accommodated in social housing had been in the UK for a longer period of time and were content with the standard of their accommodation. One person identified their rights under the Right to Buy:

*I live in a council house and there is an advantage that after five years I can buy the house. It is better to have a council house. My son has a council [house] as well. (FG7, Mixed, Leicester)*



### 3.7 Summary

This chapter raises a number of key issues in relation to how Roma migrants across differing groups understood their experiences and lives in terms of arriving and adjusting to life in the UK. A summary of some of these issues is as follows:

- Moving to the UK involved a combination of push and pull factors, coupled with aspirations of improving the quality of life for themselves and their families.
- The experience of discrimination in their countries of origin and the restrictions this placed on people in terms of labour market activity, education and community relations appeared a significant factor in people's decisions to move. The welcoming reputation of the UK was cited as a major reason for deciding upon the UK as a residence.
- The presence of family members who had already travelled to the UK played a key role in settlement decisions when in the UK.
- Social relations between Roma and non-Roma populations were broadly seen as convivial to positive. There were many examples of neighbourly behaviour, with a minority of examples of less positive relations.
- There were a number of problems associated with the majority of people accommodated in the private rented sector. Housing was routinely described as in poor condition, with some evidence of exploitation by landlords/letting agents.



# 4. Lifelong learning



## 4.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on three aspects of learning: children's education; the learning of English; and adult learning in terms of qualifications and skills. It is important to note in this context that all the focus groups in this study comprised adults over the age of 18. This is relevant because, to a large extent, existing literature on learning and Roma communities across the EU focuses on the education of children and young people within a formal school or college context, with minimal references to adult learning, qualifications and development of skills. Furthermore, a very limited proportion of the latter studies concentrate on the particular learning challenges facing migrant Roma, who may have resided in several different Member States and who spend some time back in their country of origin.

## 4.2 Educational aspirations

With regard to learning, there was a theme among respondents in every location and across age, gender and nationality of aspiring to improve their spoken and written English. Principally, individuals associated greater linguistic proficiency with access to more meaningful and rewarding employment and liberty from a lifetime of menial jobs, such

as cleaning and factory work. However, while finding a language course in order to enhance one's chance of getting a job (or a better one) was a fundamental ambition, it was also identified as a path to better integration and improved access to services.

*I would love to have language training. It would be great if I could have language training and then it would be easier to have a job. (FG14, Women, Oldham)*

Similarly, respondents placed major emphasis on the opportunities afforded to their children by the UK education system, something they had often been denied in their country of origin. This was often perceived as an investment in the future. As one respondent commented:

*...and my son is growing up. He was born here. He's going to school. Because of him, I would like to make a better future. That's why I come in this country. I didn't come live here for benefits because I want to enjoy my life. (FG8, Mixed, Leicester)*

For both men and women, education and learning were seen as the essential prerequisite to meaningful (or indeed any) employment, which was a key reason why they valued the opportunity afforded to their children.

### 4.3 Children's education

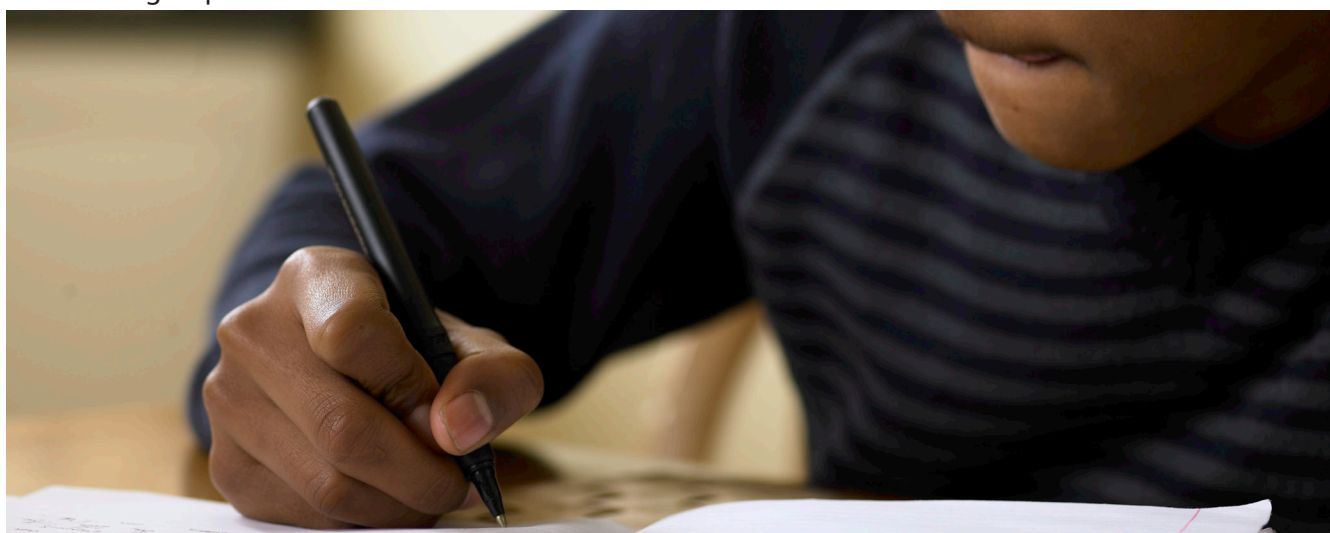
Among parents, there was universal recognition of the value of education, particularly when contrasted to their own truncated or discriminatory experiences growing up in Central and Eastern Europe. This echoes the recent testimony of Polish migrant Roma parents in the UK also quoted by Greason (2016). A number of references were made to the inclusive and accepting character of British society, which enabled Roma children and young people to make real progress within schools. This, it was perceived, would enhance their future life chances, as compared to the limited horizons created by the education system in their countries of origin. This chimes with evidence from previous case studies of Roma adults in the UK (e.g. European Dialogue, 2009), who were proud of their children's attainment and wished them to continue at least to the end of statutory education.

However, the accounts of respondents were replete with negative perceptions about education in the UK. For instance, in all the focus groups' locations, respondents originally from countries including the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland were vocal in their opinion that although the system, teachers and pupils in the UK were more inclusive, the standard of education provided was deemed to be lower than they had experienced in their countries of origin. Furthermore, although overall peer relations were positive in the school environment, a large number of respondents in London and Oldham referred to the serious impact that bullying and harassment was having on their children in British schools, often attributing this to racist sentiments among other pupils. This was not limited to White British protagonists, with respondents noting clashes and ongoing antipathy between Roma young people and students from other BME groups.

Another problematic issue was their limited understanding of the school system. One barrier to addressing this was parents' own comprehension of English. A male participant in one focus group commented:

*Unfortunately, we as parents cannot do too much because we don't speak English and we don't know the relevant legislation, policies, where we can go and how we can change the situation and make complaints. (FG13, Men, Oldham).*

In Sheffield, respondents in a focus group of women stated that they did not know why negative things were happening at school and relied on their daughter or an interpreter to inform them what had happened or what the procedure was. One commented that they were unaware 'because I don't know how to speak in English and my husband doesn't always have time to talk to the school staff about these issues' (FG18, Women, Sheffield). This quote provides a hint of a much wider disparity in language skills between men and women observed across the focus groups, which is explored in more depth in the next section. One woman pointed to the value of literate children 'because they are able to come with us [to an appointment] to translate for us and are able to help us because they write and they read' (FG11, Mixed, London), a comment echoed in focus groups in Oldham, Sheffield and Leicester. However, the involvement of children in this way can have serious implications; for example, younger people hearing and explaining information that parents may not ordinarily choose to share with them on a usual basis, as well as the misinterpretation that could occur on the basis of age and understanding.



## 4.4 Language and ESOL

A wish to access some form of English language course was universal across geographical location, age and gender, but for many respondents access to English language courses was highly restricted:

*Respondent: ...but the biggest barrier is the language. Yes, the biggest barrier is the language for the older ones.*

*Respondent: Yes, because all the young ones know how to speak English. We just don't know how to speak English. (FG11, Mixed, London)*

Nevertheless, men and women had different objectives regarding such learning opportunities. In effect, women and older people wanted very basic beginners' classes, accompanied by support in their own language, while men tended to seek improvers' classes to move towards fluency, mainly to obtain higher status and more stable employment. In contrast to women respondents, men were far more likely to state they had some English but wished to improve it or specify that written, not spoken English was their main barrier. In general, male respondents in the focus groups reported possessing enough spoken English to get by, which was in part the result of having contacts with people from other backgrounds in the workplace but was also due to more social interaction with English speakers overall. A male respondent in Leicester related how Roma employees were given key words by their employer, which they learnt, after which some had progressed to supervisory roles: *'They learn English and they're working and having better positions'*. (FG7, Mixed, Leicester)

Men in Sheffield, Leicester and Glasgow confirmed they had attended ESOL language courses at college, although several respondents indicated that they were now no longer able to access free ESOL classes because they were no longer in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA).

When questioned on what elements he struggled with, another male respondent in Salford confirmed it was more the written language and the tests he had to take, stating that, because most jobs were now online, poor written English posed a serious problem when filling in applications. This linked into a widespread inability to use computers, which was raised as significant when it came to respondents' training needs.

While men mentioned the language barrier quite often in relation to progression in work or work-related benefits, they rarely did so in connection with entering the labour market in the first place. For example, in Sheffield, Roma men were either in work or confident of finding it. They consistently stressed a desire to *'improve'* their English, confirming they had at least some basic grasp, and mentioning how interaction with British people was helping, as they *'teach me one or two new words'* (FG17, Men, Sheffield). In this group, at least one respondent aspired to be an interpreter.

The primary impact of having low levels of English skills for women was in regard to employment; specifically, initial entry into the labour market. Furthermore, women were far more likely than men to state that they did not possess any English, and across the nineteen groups women did not make any reference to attending ESOL courses, although they were vocal in requesting assistance in finding an opportunity. Many spent the majority of their time at home and were isolated from opportunities to associate with people from outside the Roma community. Caring responsibilities for children and disabled relatives were a primary reason given why women remained at home, along with general housework duties. Several noted that they struggled to communicate with their neighbours or other people in the locality, which was often seen as a source of regret, embarrassment and missed opportunity:

*I can't make friendships, because I don't speak the language. For example, I took my son to the hairdresser, and the hairdresser is a very young girl, lives close to us, and I think we could be good friends but we can't. I can understand her but I can't express myself, so for this I should have improved my English. (FG14, Women, Oldham)*

This had the effect of reinforcing what could be described as psychological 'ghettoisation', with many women acknowledging that they didn't speak to anyone outside the Roma community. Women in all areas stated that they relied on their husband or children for language support – *'they are able to come with us to translate for us and are able to help us because they write and they read'* (FG11, Mixed, London) or *'I have three children and I really insist and rely on one of them'* (FG14, Women, Oldham) – and explicitly linked their inability to get work to their poor English ability. Conversely, men gave examples of conversing in English with their children and helping female relatives. As one respondent commented:

*I help my wife to speak English. My son, he's attending school so he's okay. (FG4, Men, Glasgow)*

Several women mentioned a struggle to communicate with doctors when they had serious health issues. Difficulty in accessing suitable interpretation services was noted, including the shortage of Romanes interpreters or experiences of mistranslation and uncertainty in vital locations such as court hearings. Even initial access to services could be curtailed because of a lack of understanding. One man stated this had led to him being sanctioned and his welfare benefits ceasing as a result:

*I lost all my entitlements for a while because I was told to do something which I didn't understand and I haven't done them. (FG12, Mixed, London)*

Several respondents indicated that they felt unable to argue against decisions or insist on their rights because they could not speak or read sufficient English to be aware of the correct information and process.

Age was mentioned in London and Leicester as having a major impact on the ability to improve English. One respondent commented:

*The older ones didn't go to school, but we were still dual lingual, because we still learnt how to speak Polish and Romanes. Some also know a bit of Russian. Now they're a lot older and it's really hard for them to learn English because of their age, and they won't be able to go to school any more, and they won't be able to raise the qualification. What work would they go to? They're a bit older, and some of the work they're not able to do. (FG11, Mixed, London)*

While some respondents were keen that English language classes for older Roma people should be established, others pointed out that it was likely they would struggle because most ESOL classes were delivered in English only.

An earlier study (European Dialogue, 2009) had identified that there were differences in English proficiency depending on people's country of origin. Here, it was suggested that there were differences between Czech and Slovak Roma and between these groups and Romanian Roma in their baseline level of education, their aspirations when it came to learning and their respective abilities to make progress in areas like English. To some extent there was a similar, albeit subtle, distinction in this study.

## 4.5 Qualifications and skills

In terms of qualifications and skills, the literature on migrant Roma adults is extremely limited. While accessing and improving employment opportunities is a core priority of Roma inclusion, documentation on the sort of preliminary learning and skills development needed to get migrants 'job ready' is sparse and short on detail. For example, "What Works for Roma Inclusion in the EU" (European Union, 2012) includes a subsection titled 'Possible model approaches for Roma migrants and Roma EU nationals moving within the EU-15 Member States', which suggests 'adequate support for the labour integration of Roma EU nationals' should be a policy priority, without providing any detail, and highlights that:

*Some experiences have demonstrated that including Roma migrants (following due processes) in existing professional training and employment initiatives for Roma or for other groups in similar circumstances may be a good solution. (European Union, 2012: 44)*

It indicates that a possible option for Member States is that migrant Roma should be targeted by the same 'ordinary integration mechanisms' as deployed for other immigrants. However, it does not make any reference to language as a barrier (European Union, 2012: 41–42). In fact, it is notable that the only mention of language as a barrier for migrant Roma refers to children:

*...children of migrant Roma families who have left their homes to find better living conditions elsewhere. Many do not speak the language of the host country. As long as their language barrier is not specifically addressed, the children of migrant Roma will not integrate smoothly into the host country's schools. (European Commission, 2012: 33).*

In respect of qualifications and skills, it has been highlighted that, across the EU, many Roma do not possess the skills and competencies 'required on today's labour market' (European Commission, 2012: 17). In the present study, language proficiency was only one issue when it came to securing higher-status jobs. Many admitted that they were restricted to low-level employment, cleaning or unskilled factory work because of their limited education, and were candid about their lack of formal qualifications, even if, as the quote below demonstrates, they had the experience:





*The main issue was when he was trying to explain what kind of experience they required of him, he did have the experience but he didn't actually have the qualification for it. So when it came to obtaining the qualification, whenever he tried to get it English was the second problem. The cost was the first problem. So he was in a loop that he couldn't get out of, so it was the cost on one side and the English language on the other side. So then he tried to use the job centre services to get the qualification through them. (FG15, Mixed, Salford)*

Perhaps ironically, given the widespread emphasis on the urgent need to improve English skills, it was bi/multilingualism that was seen as a marketable talent, with a number of respondents working as interpreters (or aiming to), as an earlier excerpt showed.

Access to ESOL aside, there was a general consensus that some form of vocational training or courses was needed to address this lack of qualifications. On several occasions, respondents mentioned that they would like assistance in preparing CVs in order to assist their chances of getting work. Similar suggestions included access to other training such as administration and IT:

*I would like to go on some training or some course for admin and IT, so that would help me because I am looking for a job in the reception or secretary or anything like that, because is my hobby so I would like to go on. (FG8, Mixed, Leicester)*

## 4.6 Summary

This chapter raises a number of key issues in relation to the learning experiences and aspirations from across the age range and between genders of Roma migrants when in the UK. A summary of some of these issues is as follows:

- Although the inclusivity of the UK education system was welcomed, Roma migrants had mixed views about the quality of education in schools.
- There were a notable number of Roma children subject to bullying and harassment in schools by other pupils.
- The lack of English language skills and poor access to English language courses was seen as a major barrier to improving their engagement with local non-Roma populations.
- There were differing needs regarding English language tuition across the Roma communities from men and women. A lack of confidence in communicating in English was reported as increasing the separateness of Roma women in communities.
- A lack of formal qualifications was a crucial barrier standing in the way of further labour market involvement in more skilled sectors.



# 5. Working lives



## 5.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on work and employment. The experience of the labour market for Roma people living in the UK is under-researched, and, according to Craig (2011 p.15), 'this lacuna extends to research commissioned by the EU itself'. For the most part, Roma are often depicted as 'welfare tourists' who rely on liberal principles of state contributions to support a lifestyle that is stereotypically portrayed as being inconsistent with social expectations (Stewart, 2012). Here, a tendency to beg and criminality are superimposed onto a community of people who often struggle to realise the universal human rights that many people living in the UK often take for granted (Brown et al., 2013). This chapter looks at the aspirations for employment held by Roma migrants before looking specifically at some of their experiences to date and the conditions in which people work. The chapter also draws on the accounts from respondents to look at the issue of labour market exploitation before finally looking at the issue of social welfare.

## 5.2 Employment aspirations

As employment is a key aspiration, the people who took part in the study explained that they had been able to secure employment, often with the help of employment agencies, in roles ranging from work in factories and cleaning to professional interpreting. Where access to employment is limited, however, often as a result of unequal opportunity, or where access to work-related benefits is restricted, some people did describe how their aspiration to work increased their vulnerability to labour exploitation.

For many of the people who took part in the study, the promise of social justice was seen to be enabled through paid employment. Fair access to work schemes were also understood to be enacted and enabled through equality legislation and duty, which protects the rights of individuals and advances equality of opportunity. As one Hungarian Roma woman explained, which was reflective of many respondents' accounts, moving to the UK meant that being 'Roma' did not automatically exclude her from employment, as it might otherwise do in some other European countries:



*I would say the living standard is way better and higher here than back in Hungary. Here, at least you know that you can work, even if it's a factory job; it is a job and you can get paid. Back home, you don't even have the opportunity to have a job; especially if they hear or see that you are a Roma, you will not get a job. (FG14, Women, Oldham)*

*...maybe you are going to get in a shop like shop assistant or something like that, yes if you are lucky, but if you want to get a better job, like something in an office or do different work for like good money and it's like more easy work, if you have good English: speaking, writing, everything and plus some education or some course. (FG8, Mixed, Leicester)*

Respondents often felt that being 'Roma' in the UK did not always mean that their ethnicity was a determining factor in employment opportunities. A standard living wage also meant that people routinely felt that there was parity in the pay that was received for work that had been completed. As people reported the experience of unequal pay structures in some European countries, they also explained the experience of being paid less than other non-Roma people employed to carry out identical work. For this reason, a sense of equality often associated with the UK came to represent a central factor in the decision for people to move there.

Whilst being 'Roma' was not generally reported to disenfranchise people in regard to employment, as shown in the previous chapter, the reported low levels of qualifications, transferable skills or confidence to communicate in English presented the clearest barrier to the ambition to secure work. Whilst a small number of people who took part in the study reported that they felt confident to communicate in English and were able to be competitive during workplace interviews, many more people explained that they did not feel confident to communicate in English, and for this reason felt that their job prospects were very limited:

*It's been four months since I'm here. Somebody from my family helped me to look for a job, but for me it's very difficult because I don't speak any English, so one of the barriers is the language. (FG16, Women, Sheffield)*

Throughout the focus groups, the reported variance in confidence to communicate in English began to illuminate a further barrier to the driving ambition to access work. Where people reported being disadvantaged by a limited ability to speak or write in English, they also described the difficulty of searching and applying for jobs using the internet:

*(Interpreter) Basically, this gentleman says when he came to the UK... he immediately had an issue looking for work and finding a job and when he did go to a company or an agency they told him, 'You need to do it online. There is a certain online process that you need to be following'. He did not like that because he was not familiar with how to use the online log in the first place and obviously he did not have proper language knowledge to apply in the first place. (FG15, Mixed, Salford)*

*A lot of the time we have to do things and find jobs from the computer, and a lot of people don't know how to do things through the computer – to do the CV and everything... I've been looking for work for about two years now and I'm not able to find myself a job. Now that my son is going to school, he goes to school from one o'clock to half past three, and now I have time to work. I want to work but it's really hard to find work within those hours, so that when he goes to school I can work. (FG11, Mixed, London)*

The reported shortage of support for Roma people to write CVs in English and use the internet to search for jobs, coupled with the previously noted low levels of English language skills and lack of formal qualifications, meant that many of the Roma people who took part in the focus groups reported working on temporary contracts managed by recruitment agencies.

The type of work organised by such agencies was reported by the people who took part in the study as being limited to unskilled labour positions, which do not require workers to have special training or specific skill sets, including an ability to be able to communicate confidently in English. This type of work was reportedly limited to warehouse and factory work, labouring and cleaning work. In each focus group discussion, the jobs that people were employed in were not usually representative of what might otherwise be considered gender-specific within some Roma communities either (Tesar, 2012). Instead, both men and women reported being employed in similar unskilled labour positions.

Being employed in unskilled labour positions meant that people often reported the experience of being engaged in physically demanding work. This suggests, therefore, that whilst being 'Roma' might not have precluded people from employment opportunities, as it might otherwise do in other countries (European Roma Rights Centre, 2009), the need to provide proof of qualifications and the need to speak and read English confidently mean that there are a limited number of employment opportunities available. The potential limitation in employment opportunities, however, was not always considered to be problematic, as the ambition for those who can work is the opportunity to work. This suggests, therefore, that the type of employment they secured was seen to be less significant:

*In Slovakia, because I didn't have any education or diploma I couldn't get a job but I'm happy that here it was possible. I'm happy that I have my job here; it makes me feel very comfortable with my family that I can provide them with everything because I have a job. (FG17, Men, Sheffield)*

The sense of contentment at the opportunity to work was shared by many Roma people who took part in the focus groups. Employment became positively correlated to a felt sense of pride. This finding suggests that paid employment does not only enable people to provide financial support to their families, it also helps to validate their equal position in society.

### 5.3 Working conditions and experiences

The working conditions described by those people who took part in the study reflected the types of work that people were employed in. People frequently explained the need to work long hours in labour-intensive positions that offered little opportunity for career development. For many, the working day was characterised by heavy or intensive manual labour, which, without apparent effective Health and Safety management protocols, was reported to result in exposure to a number of occupational hazards:

*I know lots of people who've been working [at the factory]... they've been sick now because they've been at work. It's serious. Almost everybody who used to work there is now sick. [My husband] was working there as well and he ended up with a heart operation... Because he was picking up hard boxes, he started to have a hernia in the belly [too]. (FG5, Women, Leicester)*

In addition to physically hazardous working conditions, a small number of people reported the experience of community tensions in the workplace. For some people, working conditions that might be dangerous can also be characterised by discrimination. Whilst equality and employment legislation seeks to narrow opportunities for discrimination, a number of respondents reported a sense of being treated unfairly. There were a small number of respondents who claimed to be excluded from employment, including the opportunity to be given permanent contracts, not because they were Roma, but because they were not British:

*For English people it's much easier to get a contract. For example, I was working for [a Supermarket Chain] once as well. They were already giving me a contract but then there was one guy that came, he was an English guy so instead of giving me the contract, they just gave it away to this English lad. I experienced this myself in [a Supermarket Chain], so that's why I'm not even bothered looking for a job. If the time comes, if I find something good, that's worth it, I will go and do it but now, there is nothing good to do at all. (FG6, Mixed, Leicester)*

As shown in this excerpt, the impact of discrimination in the workplace can result in unfair treatment, which can challenge the aspiration to seek and find work. The reaction to this lived experience, which arguably resembles wider examples of discriminatory reactions throughout the UK (Hayes and Acton, 2007), potentially narrows the field of employment opportunities for Roma people even further. This means that some Roma people who are unable to provide proof of previous qualifications, and who might not feel confident to speak and read English effectively, are more likely to apply for positions where there will be minimal competition from other (British) applicants. Whilst people generally felt that being 'Roma' did not disenfranchise people from accessing employment, some did report the experience of being treated unfairly in the workplace. Most notably, this suggested that people living in the North of England felt that being 'Roma' was a reason to disadvantage them. In one example, a woman interviewed in Sheffield explained how her job had been given away to a Polish person:

*When I returned from my half-term, from my holiday, another Polish person got my job. So I think they gave us more problems and got Roma people to lose their job. I would have been so pleased and happy to continue my job there because it's now been eight months since I've worked there. However, I asked for holiday and I didn't have for eight months any holiday. So I've asked a holiday and when I've returned, I've just been told I've lost my job and they gave me £50 and that's it. (FG18, Women, Sheffield)*

In contrast to the experience described, however, a number of other people living in Leicester and London explained that being Roma did not lead to discrimination but did in fact usefully identify them as hard workers:

*Well, I have never had the courage to say that I am a Roma but afterwards with age, and I felt more confident, and when I worked a few more years, I said who I am. My employer really, really appreciated us for that, that we are reliable, and now he knows that there are Roma people that are also good and that are reliable and he really does respect us for that. (FG9, Mixed, London)*

*...because Roma, they work hard and they want to work, so they have the opportunity here to have a better job. Some of them, they work in a higher position like a team leader or supervisors, managers. They started from the beginning and they worked themselves up. (FG7, Mixed, Leicester)*

Taken together, these quotes suggest that where discrimination persists, the opportunity for Roma people to achieve their aspirations can be further restricted. However, where employers accept Roma people as being equal, opportunities for economic and social prosperity are enabled through respect and those opportunities for career progression that many employees take for granted.

## 5.4 Labour exploitation

The narrow employment opportunities that have already been described and the ambition to work rather than draw welfare benefits meant that some of the people who took part in the study were vulnerable to being employed by exploitative gangmasters and labour suppliers. For these people, their reported vulnerability was enhanced owing to their limited confidence to communicate in English and their limited understanding of employment rights more generally:

*I work in a factory... He give me £3.50 per hour... (Translator) basically what happens is because they had a problem with English, they couldn't speak English, they didn't know how to complain or where to complain, so basically the bosses, they treat them that way because they know they can. They [Roma person] didn't know their rights. (FG6, Mixed, Leicester)*

The opportunity for labour exploitation, as detailed here, was further compounded for some people who were critical of services such as those provided by Jobcentre Plus, partly because of language difficulties, but mostly because they found the system, including the use of online job search tools, inaccessible, complicated and frustrating. Where people became disillusioned with the services provided by such organisations, they explained



that they turned to employment agencies that they knew, through interfamilial networks, provided jobs for Roma people. However, whilst employment agencies are, in theory at least, covered by the terms of the Employment Agencies Act 1973, people described poor and even exploitative practices of being coerced to work as gardeners, car wash attendants and window cleaners for what might generally be considered paltry sums of money:

*...after you arrive [in England], you start to know more things and then your knowledge is improving about the British system. This is how you start to hear about jobs. At the beginning we didn't know where these factories are about jobs, picking and packing but now we know where all these factories are. We know where to look for a job and where the factories are because wholesale factories always need staff. We didn't have a car at the beginning but now we have cars and we drive and we are sharing the fuel. We are around four, five people that go to the same job... (FG17, Men, Sheffield)*

Where employment arrangements might be dictated through informal agreements, as was often suggested, the people who took part in the study also implied that they might not be registered for tax or National Insurance. Not only would this impact on any contractual work-related benefits, including sick pay for those people whose health might deteriorate as a result of intensive manual labour, but it might further disadvantage Roma families, as informal work agreements, which might seem legitimate to those people carrying out the work, undermine people's ability to provide evidence of habitual residence.

## 5.5 Welfare and benefits

Dagilyte and Greenfields (2015) explain that recent welfare reforms have introduced a dramatic reduction in welfare rights and that these changes impact particularly on Roma people, who are frequently represented as 'welfare migrants' in a sociopolitical discourse. According to Dagilyte and Greenfields (2015), this populist perception trickles down from the political elite to administrative bodies assessing benefits claims, a finding that is supported by a number of people who took part in the present study:

*I get the feeling that it's more difficult for Roma people. When I'm saying that I'm Polish, a few times [the job centre] ask me if I'm Polish or a Roma from Poland. Why did they ask me that? They think that all of us came here and we're like on benefits, so they make it as difficult for us as possible. (FG12, Mixed, London)*

The representation of Roma people as 'welfare tourists' implied here is one that people strongly refute. For some, the need to escape this label means that there is a deliberate attempt made to avoid accessing benefits, even if people are entitled to them:

*We don't rely on benefits because we didn't come here to live on benefits but to build up something for our children. (FG14, Women, Oldham)*

For those people who took part in the study, in particular those who reported employment in informal working arrangements or within projects of labour exploitation and those who lacked confidence to communicate in English, the opportunity to claim welfare benefits, which they believed they were entitled to, was further restricted by the fear that an application might lead to investigations about their right to reside in the UK. As mentioned above, the inaccessibility of welfare benefits, resulting either from unsuccessful entitlement tests at the point of application or individual/community reticence, can lead people to seek security through group living arrangements, which provide examples of interfamilial support:

*When I arrived it was very, very difficult. We didn't have money. We didn't receive any money from the government. I didn't have a house like now. I used to live with my parents-in-law. Our family member from our Roma community helped us to apply to find a job, to look for jobs. (FG16, Women, Sheffield)*

The centrality of 'family' as a source of support for those who struggle to achieve their ambition to secure equal opportunities in economic and social prosperity is crucial. In regard to the theme of welfare and benefits, it would seem, on the basis of the information provided by those people who took part in this study, that interfamilial support, in relation to pooled capital, forms a central part in the lives of Roma people moving to and living in the UK. In other words, the benefit of close and supportive family networks helps to provide and safeguard the welfare of individual members. This theme will be returned to in the next chapter.

In the absence of close family networks, some people explained that moving to the UK was particularly difficult when Habitual Residence Tests could not be passed and where recourse to public funds was denied. Where people are employed on an informal basis, or engaged, albeit unwittingly, in activities of labour exploitation, their ability to be financially independent is understandably reduced. As the ability to afford the general cost of living can be difficult to maintain (Anderson, 2010), people reported the experience of going without food and shelter:

*(Talking about a local family) They had a very big problem with accessing benefits. The first application was rejected. They ended up in a poor situation and they didn't have anything to eat. So the start or the beginning was very, very hard. They've been hungry, they've been homeless but they are [working] now and they are starting to be better. (FG5, Women, Leicester)*

Whilst some people reported the experience of homelessness and destitution, in a similar way to that described above, a number of other people did report the experience of being able to access welfare benefits. In all cases, these were limited to Tax Credits and Child Benefit or Disability Living Allowance. One person talked about receiving Employment and Support Allowance. However, in accordance with the ambitions that many of the Roma people described, people explained that they were keen to be in a position where they were no longer dependent on welfare payments:

*I used to be on Employment Support Allowance, but I feel okay now here. I want to work now. I used to claim Disability Living Allowance, but I stopped everything and I want to go to work now, because I have a baby in my house. (FG4, Men, Glasgow)*

As this excerpt shows, the ability to become financially independent is a central ambition where family and dependants are concerned.

## 5.6 Summary

This chapter raises a number of key issues in relation to the work and employment experiences and aspirations of Roma migrants when in the UK. A summary of some of these issues is as follows:

- The acquisition of work was often a crucial component in the ability of Roma migrants to regard themselves as full and participatory members of society.
- Many of the people spoken to were working in industries characterised by unskilled roles, low pay and long hours.
- There was evidence of complex relationships in the workplace. Roma migrants alluded to a sense of being subject to discrimination in the workplace in favour of British workers. This led to the suppression of Roma within the labour market and seemingly inhibited their attempts to move out of unskilled roles.
- Roma migrants recounted experiences that indicated that they were particularly susceptible to labour market exploitation.
- Although a number of respondents reported accessing the social welfare system, Roma respondents routinely argued against the popular positioning of them as 'welfare tourists', often reportedly not claiming welfare benefits even when they were eligible. In such cases, financial support was often provided by family members.
- Cases of destitution were not uncommon and people relied on the support of family and close networks in order to provide food and shelter until they were able to support themselves.

# 6. Family and wellbeing



## 6.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on the wellbeing of respondents. There were a number of important factors that were discussed in the focus groups, which underline the role that families and networks had when adapting to life in the UK. As a number of the groups were split on gender lines, it was also possible to have specific discussions about the roles men and women had taken on when in the UK, particularly in relation to informal care work. The chapter also looks at the issue of access to and experiences of healthcare services, before finally looking more broadly at the issue of aspirations held by the respondents.

*At the first place, his uncle, he arrived to Birmingham but because he couldn't speak he was not able to get any job here, but he actually knew someone, he had a friend in Leicester that tell him, 'Look, if you come here I can help you to get a job'... That's where they started to work, all of them, but they all came to work here. It was gradually, so first came, get a job, then help another one and then basically one after another. The whole family managed to come. They saved up some money, rent out a house and called the family over, so that's how the community grows. Then when the man starts to work and get some savings, they rent out a house and then he called his wife and children to join him to come after him. (FG7, Mixed, Leicester)*

## 6.2 Family and networks

As already detailed, the vast majority of respondents we spoke to had arrived in the UK as part of a small or extended family. Once a decision to leave their country of origin was reached, the main reason for deciding to come to the UK was to join other family members who had already arrived.

It was rare to hear about any instances where, at this initial stage, 'officials' or services were approached for signposting towards settlement help; people instead seemed to prefer to draw upon the support of close family members. Such family members often played a vital role upon arrival and for variable durations afterwards. Routinely, as the first port of call family members undertook many activities including: signposting services and advice; providing more engaged support in the form of helping people find work; providing accommodation; and helping navigate local systems:

*When I arrived here, my uncle helped me. I didn't have any English but my uncle did and my uncle helped me to work in the same place with him. (FG2, Men, Glasgow)*

*I don't pay the house because I live with my brother-in-law and he's helping me financially as well. (FG2, Men, Glasgow)*

When family members were not available, respondents chose not to reach out to services or outsiders. As a consequence, they often experienced challenges in securing access to various services such as health, for instance, as this respondent describes:

*We have to schedule an appointment, and if we don't have a family member to help us this is going to be very difficult for us. (FG16, Women, Sheffield)*

Friends also played a significant role at times of disruption, occasionally offering accommodation and support:

*So they were living with the family for about a week, they'd been kicked out then and they found accommodation with another Roma but they had eight children. They allowed them to come and live with them for about two weeks. (FG5, Women, Leicester)*

Where people had proficiency in English they often found themselves offering and being drawn on as a source of support, signposting and guidance to a range of family members, friends and acquaintances. Although this was never seen as a problem, there was a clear sense of responsibility and duty felt by those with these skills:

*I work, but it's very difficult because in my community I am the only one who is fluent in English. Everybody comes to me and I think that all Roma families need help to have access to different services: jobs, businesses, credits, courses, benefits. But because of the language barrier and the high anti-Gypsyism they cannot, and it would be great to change this. (FG12, Mixed, London)*

### 6.3 Identities

Issues associated with the immediate settlement period and social relations between communities were discussed in an earlier chapter. Building on these issues, and helping to shape respondents' sense of wellbeing within the UK, there was a persistent discussion about the notion of identities. In particular, these discussions touched on the issue of how their 'identities' were evolving, in the context of respondents' subsequent experiences of settlement and embeddedness within the context of the UK. Often, such issues were once again juxtaposed with the lack of freedom and discrimination most people had experienced in their countries of origin. Some respondents talked at length about the notion of tradition in the context of identity and the fear they had of 'losing' their identity. For instance: *'...personally think that we need to adapt, but it seems to me like we were losing our identity'. (FG10, Mixed, London)*

This was particularly apparent in the case of schools, in terms of mixing between children of many backgrounds and the bullying this sometimes entailed, but also when talking about the increasing number of personal intimate





relationships between Roma and non-Roma adults. Similarly, respondents pointed to a generational shift for young people, who appeared to prefer to speak English rather than Romanes, behave differently and take on more of the broader behaviours of the larger non-Roma populations. However, for a notable number of people, although there were apparent tensions with negotiating these identities, such challenges were welcome in exchange for a more promising future for their children:

*Maybe we lose our identity, but we are gaining something else. I'm proud of my son, who is educated. He works as a teacher. Why should I be ashamed that he is going to work? He has a suit, a tie, a better life ahead of him. (FG10, Mixed, London)*

*I'm happy that my children go to school and they learn and how they grow up, they learn English and I encourage them to speak in English and I talk to them as well in English because they might become a doctor one day or maybe not, or they might become somebody else. I want them to learn English but not to forget Slovakian and Roma. (FG17, Men, Sheffield)*

## 6.4 Informal care work

As we have seen in earlier chapters, it was very common for respondents to describe traditional gender roles within the focus groups, which often described men as working and women as performing familial caring activities. For the majority of respondents with families, women often described familiar household routines of cooking, cleaning and looking after children common to many people from a wide range of communities. In most cases, such roles were narrated unproblematically and in keeping with their expectations. As we have also seen, respondents with children overwhelmingly reported engaging fully with educational opportunities, with the vast majority having children enrolled in local schools. However, it was noted that where families were large this created practical problems in getting children to school when multiple schools were involved:

*Some children go to different schools. I have three different schools that I need to drop children, and my husband goes to work. I find it very difficult. I would like all my children to go to the same school, but this is not possible, I've been told. We have so many schools that we have to attend in time, and we find it very difficult. (FG16, Women, Sheffield)*

In some cases, women talked about looking forward towards a time when their children were of school age in order to provide time for themselves to enter the paid labour market. Some respondents for whom this was already the case struggled to find work that would fit around their commitments:

*Because, for example, I've been looking for work for about two years now and I'm not able to find myself a job. Now that my son is going to school, he goes to school from one o'clock to half past three, and now I have time to work. I want to work but it's really hard to find work within those hours, so that when he goes to school I can work. (FG10, Mixed, London)*

*I wake up in the morning, take the children to school, prepare some food for my daughter, who is just one year old. I prepare breakfast for my partner because he had an accident, actually two accidents recently, so I take care of him at home. Then I prepare lunch and try to look for a job because our income doesn't cover our needs and the expenses. (FG14, Women, Oldham)*

In other cases where women expressed an active desire to enter the paid labour market, their limited skills in English often prevented them from doing so:

*I agree with the lady, I think it's a bit difficult in our age, especially the language, learning the language and getting a job. I have three children and I really insist and rely on one of them. If he or she was not here, I would fail here. I don't know the language, however I feel good here and I would like to stay. (FG14, Women, Oldham)*

For a notable number of respondents, language support, as we have already seen, came from their own children:

*I'm okay with the doctors and the services. I use my child who can help me and sometimes she speaks better than the translator. (FG14, Women, Oldham)*

*Yes, for me as well it was the language, because I didn't know to say how are you or something, so it was difficult for me, and my mum, for her it would be more difficult for her to learn, so I was knowing I have to learn because if I didn't, then nobody would help. We go to the school and I was learning slowly and I learnt something, so I helped my mum with everything, like sorted out things like the housing and stuff like that, so that was helpful. (FG7, Mixed, Leicester)*

*I am not ashamed for being a Roma, wherever we go. The doctors were asking us but it was difficult, because if a gadje was in front of me at the doctor at the hospital they were going in front, regardless that I was first. We always had to be the last just because we were Roma. The doctor would see the gadje first and then we were next. (FG16, Women, Sheffield)*

For the overwhelming majority, such fears of discrimination did not appear to materialise. As this respondent reports:

*Basically, my experience is the doctors here in the UK and the professionals, they are really doing the things the Czech doctors or Slovakian doctors would never do for us in our country of origin... (FG8, Mixed, Leicester)*

However, it should be noted that a small minority of respondents did intimate that discrimination may have occurred, particularly when attempting to make appointments to see a health professional:

*I heard many bad things about the British health system and the doctors, so when I was sick in the last two months, I didn't go to the doctor. I was afraid because if they look at you and they see that you are different or see that you come from a different country, then you will be treated differently. I don't know why it is. (FG14, Women, Oldham)*

*Yes, we are going to see the doctor because it is about our health. But the attitude that you have to face there is not good. As we told you, if you call them and they say, 'Sorry, but I cannot make an appointment. In this case all I can offer is just to take a paracetamol'. And he doesn't even know with whom he's talking to. I just call him and he says there's no appointment and take paracetamol. This is not fair. If I were English, and I introduced myself as William for instance, they would immediately say, 'Oh yes, sir, please come here. Come over here'. (FG13, Men, Oldham)*





However, like other facets of their lives in the UK, the ability to effectively converse in English was a major barrier to access to and subsequent meaningful engagement with healthcare professionals. The accounts of respondents were replete with examples where they had felt that access to an adequate level of service within healthcare (GPs, hospitals and dentists) had been denied as a result of low levels of English language abilities and, by extension, confusion with the UK health system.

## 6.6 Experiences of healthcare services

Respondents regularly reported poor experiences with healthcare in the UK. To some extent, this was a continuation of the difficulties experienced by many as a result of language problems, which led to misunderstandings between healthcare professionals and service users, and the difficulty this then caused in understanding the nuances of the UK healthcare system. The respondent below provides an example of his experience of healthcare when he tries to explain that his understanding is limited: in other words, he asks for help. However, this is overlooked by the person dealing with him:

*For me the main issue is language. It's very hard to get an interpreter. I went to the reception last time and I said I need an appointment and a Polish speaker because I don't speak English. The lady said, 'Oh, you do speak English, you will be fine'. Maybe I speak very basic English but it's not enough to understand issues around health. (FG10, Mixed, London)*

A lack of knowledge about how the healthcare system in the UK operates, alongside a scarcity of professional translators, appeared, in some cases, to add to the confusion and negative perceptions of the healthcare system some respondents had experienced. Comments and concerns were raised about the treatment people often received, some of which could be construed as being directly linked to differences in how healthcare may be delivered in the UK compared to their countries of origin. Here, two women demonstrate how their anxieties and uncertainties about healthcare impacted on a negative perception about common practices within the healthcare system in the UK:

*My sister delivered a baby, and had to go home the next day because they realised that she is Roma. (FG13, Men, Oldham)*

*When it comes to an emergency situation you can't get any support or help. You have to follow procedure, whether it's an appointment or waiting for something else. They don't like the fact that she waits for a female GP for female problems like smear tests. They told her to come back in three years. The fact that she said, 'Why every three years?' She said she wanted it annually, or even at that time when she went to the people she was told, 'If you don't have any pain you don't need any care'... (FG15, Mixed, Salford)*

For others, their descriptions of events where they felt they had had a poor level of service seemed linked to their position as a migrant, or their ethnicity, or being someone with poor levels of English. The respondents below reflect the situations that were described within a number of focus groups:

*Once I cut my hand, even my vein, and I went to the hospital. I was bleeding heavily, so I went to the hospital and I had to wait in the corridor with this pressure bandage. After five hours, they took the bandage and gave me some anaesthetic and sent me back to the corridor for another two hours. Then they started to do something with my hand, but they didn't do a very good job. (FG13, Men, Oldham)*

*Regarding the doctors, I don't think they are good because they don't take you and your problem seriously. So, for instance, if I take my child with a high fever to the doctor, they tell me to go home, take him to bed and just take care of him. But I got scared, I was very scared because I didn't know what happened with my son, so I ran out to the street to call an ambulance; I stopped the cars. So, I asked for the doctors checking him in the hospital at least for three additional days with me, just to observe him, and we had to go home. (FG14, Women, Oldham)*

In contrast, some people spoke very highly of the services received, particularly when compared to their experience in their countries of origin, as shown above. A small number of respondents reported wholly positive experiences of the UK healthcare system. These largely referred to either a sense of equity in comparison to their country of origin:

*[Healthcare] is a high standard; they're trying to help us. For example, the pills. We had to pay pills in Slovakia... They don't need to pay here. Even when you go to a doctor and you want a treatment, you have to pay to go to the doctor in Slovakia. Yes, in Slovakia you have to pay for every single day you are in hospital. If you are sick and you don't have money you can't even go to the hospital to have a treatment. Here, we don't need to pay for pills, so we don't need to pay for the treatment, and they actually want to help us and especially so they know their job and they know how to treat. They take care of us. They're not negligent or they wouldn't give us any treatment, they actually care about us and they give us treatments. We go in the GPs, we go into dentists, we have regular check-ups. In labour I felt that as well, my husband was with me. We feel that the people here, they are more approachable. We feel we are loved. They give us smiles when we go somewhere. We feel the empathy as well, the people here, they have empathy when we're telling them some problems and doctors, they feel empathy as well. (FG7, Mixed, Leicester)*

or their experience of benefiting from low-cost medicines that would have been very expensive and possibly even unaffordable in their countries of origin, for instance:

*I have diabetes, like my friend here; so does my wife. When it comes to medicine, it's free and I can say that they bring it home to my house once a month. My wife, she has problems with the eyes and she has to take injections. I have to say that one injection actually costs £1,000. Every time they go they have to do the injections in both eyes. So when it comes to this health stuff, we are very, very pleased! (FG1, Women, Glasgow)*

## 6.7 Aspirations for the future

For some respondents, their aspirations in life had already been achieved by their move to the UK, away from the discrimination and the often life-limiting circumstances that punctuated their everyday lives in their countries of origin. For others, when asked about their aspirations for the future, respondents tended to provide responses on a spectrum that ranged from contentment with their current circumstances to what could be seen as mundane desires. In terms of the latter, these often revolved around improving their standard of living or simply having the opportunity to improve their English language abilities and/or gain employment – for instance, *'I would like to be able to learn English and to have a job'*

(FG16, Women, Sheffield) – whereas those who were already in work occasionally talked about the desire for advancement through promotions. Extending this, a number of other respondents also expressed a desire for their children to attend school and complete their education in the UK and that this would be the key factor in improving their children's life chances. Such a desire was again seen as one of the key reasons underpinning their move to the UK:

*I'm thinking about my children. I wasn't educated. I barely speak English, so the only job I can do is cleaning, and I am fine with this, but my kids have better opportunities here. I want them to be educated to get decent jobs in the future, and I know it will be easy for them to find a job here, because they will be judged upon their skills, but not upon where they come from. (FG10, Women, London)*

One respondent talked about how they hoped members of the non-Roma community would be able to help them whilst in the UK:

*Maybe more native solicitors that are able to help us and help our needs, because we have a lot of problems, especially with housing... (FG13, Men, Oldham)*

The common theme that featured in many respondents' accounts was that the UK was a place where people could afford to have aspirations and begin to work towards meeting them. This was often described in contrast to their country of origin:

*I think there are goals here that you can achieve here, in England... I don't work now but I've worked in the country, many places. I loved working. It is really good. You don't have to work too much at the factory, they tell you just what you have to do and you have to do it. It's simple and great. And it is easy to get a job there. Now I just want to establish a business and do something bigger. I want to improve my English and stay here in England and to do something good. (FG13, Men, Oldham)*

*I would be happy to see that we all have the same opportunities and we all are able to talk in English and that we have a nice life. (FG16, Women, Sheffield)*



*Here, it's better because you can go to college part-time and you can work as well, but in Slovakia you did not want that. I feel better here because I can study if I want to become somebody in my life. I want an advanced job with high skills, go up a level in my current job, I can do a course and this can happen. (FG17, Men, Sheffield)*

The majority of those asked simply said that they wished to remain in the UK indefinitely:

*Everything is better here. We are here since 2007 and my husband works for nine years now in the same place. (FG16, Women, Sheffield)*

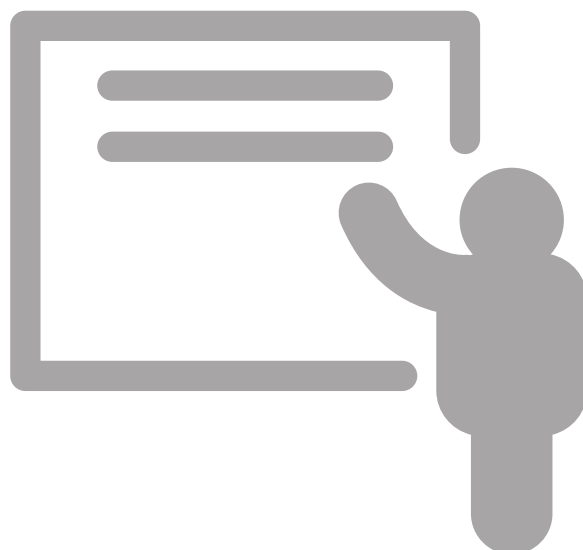
One of the legacies of anti-Gypsyism in Central and Eastern Europe was the almost universal determination expressed by respondents not to return 'home'. Comments ranged from 'We, as a Roma, we don't have any future in Slovakia' (FG7, Mixed, Leicester) to 'Yes, even my kids, they absolutely do not want to go back to Poland' (FG10, Mixed, London).

## 6.8 Summary

This chapter raises a number of key issues in relation to the wellbeing of Roma migrants since arriving in the UK. A summary of some of these issues is as follows:

- Families provided the main source of support for migrant Roma who were new to the country and at an early stage of settlement.
- Migration to the UK had initiated a process of negotiating their new identities in the context of shaping traditions and cultures.
- Traditional gender roles were played out in the UK, particularly in terms of informal care work. Women were often actively looking for routes into the paid labour market.
- Low levels of English language skills and lack of familiarity with the UK healthcare system meant that there were often frustrations and confusion caused when accessing healthcare services.
- There were mixed feelings towards the healthcare system and care received from healthcare practitioners when in the UK.
- Many respondents had already realised their aspirations in life by having migrated to the UK, although there were modest aspirations held by many people associated with improving their language skills, entering the paid labour market, their children receiving a good education and living within a cohesive and non-discriminatory society.

# 7. Conclusion



This report has explored the views and experiences of a number of people within Roma communities who have migrated to the UK in recent years. The research was designed in partnership with a team of researchers from the Roma communities and undertaken wholly by these researchers. We believe this is the largest study of its kind co-produced in tandem with members of the Roma communities that has focused on the settlement experiences of Roma in the UK. This report does not attempt to make definitive statements about the situations and views of all Roma migrants in the UK. Chapters 3 to 6 offer an analysis of the discussions held with Roma people. This analysis was led by the issues, concerns and perceptions that emerged within the interviews. A number of recurrent and inter-related issues feature across these discussions, the details of which offer insights into how a number of Roma have been finding life since settling in the UK.

## 7.1 Settlement in the UK

In January 2014, temporary restrictions on the working rights of A2 citizens in the UK were lifted and media coverage prompted a great deal of public anxiety about 'the Roma' and their access to labour markets and benefits (Dagilyte and Greenfields, 2015). Whilst there will inevitably have been a range of nuanced personal issues that

prompted the decisions to migrate to the UK, the opportunity to find work was cited by respondents in our research as a key factor. However, it is important to distinguish the reasons for mobility among Roma from those of their compatriots. While *purely* economic factors have motivated many Polish, Czech, Slovak or Hungarian citizens to move to the UK since 2004, and many came with offers of work via agencies, this experience was not wholly shared by Roma. To a large extent, their migration was (and continues to be) determined by societal conditions, which saw widespread exclusion from mainstream education and employment. For non-Roma migrants, EU expansion offered the opportunity to maximise their earning potential, often grounded in the skills and qualifications they already possessed (see Scullion and Pemberton, 2010). For Roma, it presented an escape from a situation of endemic discrimination, but initially without a clear strategy or the necessary resources (educational, occupational and financial) for establishment.

## 7.2 Work and welfare

Research by Glennie and Pennington (2013) shows that most Roma people in the UK are more likely to be in work and paying taxes and less likely to be drawing on the welfare system. In accordance with Glennie and Pennington's (2013) findings and a growing corpus of research, which examines the various drivers for Roma diaspora (Gay y Blasco, 2002; Cemlyn and Ryder, 2011; Brown et al., 2013; Dagilyte and Greenfields, 2015), the people who took part in this study explained that opportunities for paid employment, rather than opportunities related to welfare benefits, were the primary drivers for migration to the UK. Whilst the opportunity to escape the pressures of anti-Gypsyism and the various projects of enforced assimilation or control were also cited, the determined need to secure employment featured as the dominant theme throughout each focus group discussion. While most of the respondents stressed the financial advantages of migration to the UK, some also mentioned how opportunities for work were perceived to be available in ways that might not always be possible in countries such as Slovakia or Poland.

The perceived need to avoid welfare benefits described in this study highlights a significant finding. Whilst most people who took part in the study explained their reluctance to apply for benefits, it was also made clear that drawing benefits, as is an individual's right once the Habitual Residence Test has been passed, was uncomfortable for many of the people we spoke to. Although a number of people were receiving welfare payments, emergent populist stereotypes mean that some Roma people chose to eschew benefits that they were entitled to, so as to avoid being labelled as a 'welfare tourist'.

## 7.3 The role of family

As societal conditions in many CEE countries affect Roma communities in general, there is little incentive for family members to remain behind if they have the capacity to migrate. As a result, and drawing upon the accounts collated in this study, the migration of Roma populations has been characterised by the staggered movement of families and extended kin groups. Upon arrival in the UK, such groupings would first attempt to seek out the support and assistance of other family members. Whilst the description of some living arrangements might constitute overcrowding, people explained that newly arrived families would

often seek to move in with relatives so as to share pooled financial resources and achieve a degree of social security until such time that financial independence was enabled, usually through employment. Brown et al. (2013) mapped migrant Roma communities across the UK, indicating that the reasons for settlement in particular areas were complex but that family networks were a crucial factor (along with access to relatively cheap accommodation) in determining exactly where people chose to live. However, where families experienced eviction or were unable to live with family members or attain employment, even in a temporary position, the risk of vulnerability to labour exploitation was reported to increase. Whilst varying knowledge of employment and housing legislation and rights was reported, so was the suggestion that without the guarantee of bona fide employment people could quickly find themselves homeless and destitute. This desperation, coupled with an inability or refusal to access welfare benefits, added to precariousness, which in turn created a vulnerability that could be exploited in the labour market.

## 7.4 Education and language

When describing their learning aspirations, one specific demand dominated the discussions with Roma respondents. Variants of the phrase 'to be able to learn English and to have a job' were repeated in every location by Roma of all backgrounds and ages. These findings challenge perceptions of Roma as either 'workshy' or ambivalent towards educational opportunities. Some of these preconceptions are held by institutions. For example, in a report on Roma and education the European Commission wrote, 'We need to convince Roma and non-Roma alike, of the indispensable benefits of good-quality education and training' (European Commission, 2012: 13). This implies that Roma people are unsure of the value of learning. The same report did not place any emphasis on Roma's own perceptions and aspirations for themselves and their children in this regard. The evidence gathered in the nineteen focus groups points firmly in the opposite direction. We found no such equivocation about the importance of education. As well as participants articulating their hopes for the next generation with significant clarity, it was clear that they fully grasped the link to employment, challenging the Commission's view that '...the connection is not always made between quality education and the prospect of securing a good job' (European Commission, 2012: 18).

## 7.5 Community relations

Neighbourhood relations can mostly be seen as convivial to positive. The situation in the UK was often described as a huge improvement when compared to the social relations within their countries of origin. Roma spoke of a general absence of discrimination and overt prejudice from neighbours, a willingness to communicate between communities and a general sense of equality inherent in many interpersonal exchanges. However, a distinct lack of English language skills across many of the people we spoke to significantly limited the potential for positive social relations to develop. People were often left frustrated by not being able to make themselves understood, or understand what was being said, in a range of encounters with neighbours, health practitioners, co-workers, schools and so on. However, it should be noted that not all descriptions of interactions between communities were positive. Within local communities there were a notable, albeit small, number of instances of harassment of one kind or another. Since the result of the referendum on the UK's future relationship with the EU was delivered, there have been reports of increased discrimination towards Roma in the media (see Ansell, 2016 for example) and through other research the authors have been involved in this suggests such conviviality is fragile within local communities. Similarly, there were suggestions of discrimination against Roma and community tensions in the workplace. Some children were also experiencing bullying within schools. As such, whilst the move to the UK has been a positive move for most Roma, this should be seen in the context of the desperate conditions characterised by entrenched prejudice and deep social exclusion people originated from. Such prior experiences appear to buffer, to some extent, current negative experiences of prejudice in the UK, as people look further back to more challenging times and tolerate their current circumstances.

## 7.6 The future

Since the fieldwork for this study was undertaken, the decision arising from the referendum on the desire to leave the European Union was delivered. The decisions that are now being taken on how the UK deals with the result of the referendum point to an immediate and medium-term future punctuated by uncertainty and precariousness for Roma currently in the UK. The threat of the current position was rarely discussed in the focus groups in this study, with a notable exception. One Slovak Roma man was asked about his future plans and he commented darkly that:

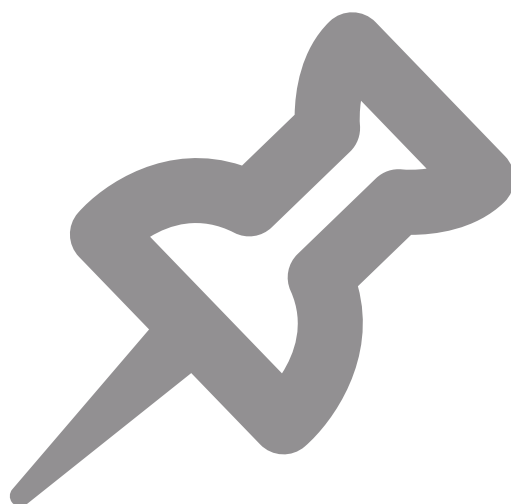
*...in 2016 maybe everybody goes home, 2016, all Slovaks move to Slovakia... When they speak you go, you must go. (FG4, Men, Glasgow).*

Indeed, a recent report by the IPPR (Morris, 2016) points to some of the issues now afoot and how local authorities and partners can tackle some of the issues in relation to Roma communities. We agree with Morris (2016) that the challenges posed by the UK's emerging exit from the EU could further seriously marginalise Roma communities already in the UK.

Many Roma people who took part in this work have arguably already 'integrated' into their local surroundings and become full members of their wider neighbourhoods and communities. As such, owing to the size of the migrant Roma population in the UK, coupled with the persistence and, in some notable cases, increasing discrimination against Roma across Europe, members of the Roma community are likely to be a continuing presence across the UK for the foreseeable future.



# 8. Recommendations



1. There is a significant need to increase the supply of suitable ESOL provision that can be accessed by all sections of the Roma community at varying entry points and for specific applications by taking into account the needs and the special characteristics of the local communities.
2. In order to provide better access to basic services for Roma communities local authorities, and key local partners, should create opportunities for Roma community members to become interpreters.
3. For the social inclusion of Roma in the UK to become a reality, policy-makers at all levels need to take into account the experiences many people have of deep-seated discrimination against Roma within their countries of origin. Actions to facilitate greater social inclusion need to account for the systematic exclusion that has occurred in the way in which people have been permitted access to education, the labour market, democratic systems, healthcare and so on.
4. Awareness-raising initiatives should be undertaken by those involved, directly or indirectly, in Roma inclusion policy at both strategic decision-making and front-line levels within statutory and commissioning agencies. These should be delivered, where possible, by appropriately qualified Roma facilitators.
5. In order to more effectively overcome prejudice and enhance more sustainable social relations and intercultural dialogue, policy-makers are also advised to invest in initiatives that bring together policy-makers, Roma and non-Roma people around common concerns and issues.
6. There are many talented people within the Roma community who can help to foster greater inclusion and reduce social inequalities. However, for resources to allow these leaders to emerge local authorities and other key agencies should support the growth of leadership within the Roma communities by helping to facilitate training and providing people with opportunities.
7. Local authorities with significant Roma populations living in their areas should encourage and support the development of Roma community organisations and community groups. This could be done by targeting funding opportunities towards such populations and proactively providing technical assistance and capacity building.
8. Local authorities should take a proactive role in the wake of the discussions about the UK settlement as part of leaving the EU to ensure there are strategies in place to support Roma migrants, specifically as part of their wider work on migrant integration.

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